

# 100% Virtual Academies Iowa: Proceed with Caution

For the Senate Oversight  
Committee

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# Educational

- The art of teaching.
  - Students often do not 'get it' with just one strategy or modality. It is through a teacher's diagnostic ability, to observe, inquire, and try different strategies that they are able to best serve their students.
- Data does not seem to suggest higher, or in many cases equal, student achievement using an online model versus a live teacher.
- Impact on creativity and social skills / interactions?
- Fully online classes likely do not provide opportunities to engage in a rich discussion with peers about current issues and events.
- A teacher can be nimble and make changes in instructional practices in a traditional setting.
- A teacher can notice problems with learning that are not possible through a computer and make teaching adjustments that enable student success.
- Might a student choose 100% virtual for reasons such as avoiding interaction, ability to "sleep in", fear of public speaking, or as a way to avoid challenging courses / demanding teachers? Is that O.K.?

# Educational Data

While not claiming to have comprehensive data on virtual academies, some results from other states (from sources other than the for-profit providers) lead to believe that Iowa needs to proceed with caution:

Pennsylvania (AYP chart)  
([The Times - Leader, July, 2011](#))

Colorado Connections Acad., 2011  
69% students proficient or advanced in reading  
37% students proficient or advanced in math  
([Education News Colorado](#))

## Adequate Yearly Progress: Comparing cyber charter schools and local school districts

Who fared in making the AYP benchmark set by the state, 2005-2010:

Cyber school	2005 -06	2006 -07	2007 -08	2008 -09	2009 -10
21st Century	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Achievement house			✓		
Agora Cyber					
Central Penn Digital Learning Foundation	✓			✓	✓
Commonwealth Connections Academy			✓		
PA Learners Online Regional Cyber					
Pennsylvania Cyber		✓		✓	✓
Pennsylvania Distance Learning					
Pennsylvania Leadership Charter School					✓
Pennsylvania Virtual		✓			✓
Susq-Cyber	✓			✓	
<b>School District</b>					
Crestwood	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dallas	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Greater Nanticoke Area	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hanover Area	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hazleton Area	✓			✓	✓
Lake-Lehman	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northwest Area	✓	✓	✓		✓
Pittston Area	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wilkes-Barre Area	✓	✓		✓	✓
Wyoming Area	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wyoming Valley West	✓	✓		✓	✓

SOURCE: PA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

TERRIE MORGAN-BESECKER RESEARCH  
GARY VISGATIS THE TIMES LEADER

# A Place for Online Learning to Enhance Education in Iowa?

## ***Absolutely!***

- Dual credit (high school + college) online course opportunities
- Blended (such as combining live, face to face interaction w/ online opportunities) courses are increasingly common in Iowa.
- Iowa Learning Online (ILO) current...and expanded?
- Recent work of "[Iowa Communities of Practice & Innovation](#)"
- Credit recovery, such as e2020
  - Licensed teacher tailors the content to the individual needs of the student
  - Student's regularly have meetings and conversations with teachers to ensure appropriate progress is being made
- Expanded opportunities in hard to fill areas
  - Course that may not otherwise be available in the local district due to teacher shortage areas or size of the school district.
- In these cases, online learning supplements and enhances educational opportunities for students, but does not replace the critical component of live, face to face interaction with teachers and students

# Practicality

- Accountability
  - In a traditional setting, school personnel have the ability to monitor learning, from the amount of time a student is engaged in the learning activity; to who is actually engaging in the activity.
  - When problems occur or learning is disrupted, we have the ability to engage the student in a face to face setting.
- Participation in activities
  - Students open enrolled out of the resident district will not have access to any of the activities that they may have been accustomed too. (i.e. music, athletics, speech)
  - Virtual academies boast activities, but offerings can not be on par with what may be offered in the resident district.

# Unhealthy Competition?

- As superintendents, we have enough wars to fight. We are not interested in fighting with our friends and neighbors.
- Will this damage a spirit of collegiality and sharing among school districts?
- I don't believe this is within the spirit of how open-enrollment is designed to be implemented.
  - Open enrollment is for contiguous districts
- Deceptive advertising practices - who are these virtual academies "really" marketing to, compared to the "politically safe" student population at times claimed to be targeted?
- How would the legislature view our local school district if we began using tax dollars to heavily advertise in local media markets for open enrollment students?
- Does adding to tax requirements for lowans (changing students to 1.0 level for virtual academies) mean more competition for / greater strain on existing and future resources?

# Legal Implications

- Dillon's Rule
  - Dillon's rule construes grants of power to localities very narrowly. The bottom line is that if there is a question about a local government's power or authority, then the local government does not receive the benefit of the doubt.
- [Clarke Decision](#) - for open enrollment, must "enroll" in and be "in attendance" at an Iowa school.
- Pocohontas Decision
- Proposed legislation by the DE.
  - Is there already a recognition that there are legal concerns, since "Branstad-Reynolds Administration Recommendation for World Class Schools" identifies a proposal to create two pathways for online learning in Iowa. "First, districts can engage directly with online content providers, and the responsibility would be on the district to make sure the courses offered meet Iowa quality standards, such as being backed by an Iowa licensed teacher and being aligned to the Iowa Core."

# Financial

- In a school district that has regular time education students enroll in the virtual academy, the ~ \$6,000 per pupil cost will follow the student out of the district.
- For schools with a current HSAP, the resident district generates \$1,800 (.3 FTE) in Iowa. If those students enroll in the virtual academy, each student is now increased to 1.0 and generates \$6,000.
- This amounts to an additional tax increase of \$4800 per student that must be generated, of which 97%+ of those funds go to out of state, for-profit education companies.
- Many consider schools to be underfunded at current levels of allowable growth. What will be the future impact on schools and other entities of asking even higher levels of tax revenue to be generated for these new student weightings?
- In these virtual academies, how much is really being spent "on kids" when they are designed to be for profit, and can (apparently) spend this much on marketing and advertising? - Where is that \$5,280 (97% of \$6,000) per student really going?



Thank you for allowing us to speak  
with you today, and for the service  
you provide for the people of Iowa!